

PUBLIC FEEDBACK REPORT NO. 3

FOCUS GROUP
GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE
HAD CONTACT WITH THE COURT
SEPTEMBER 17, 2015

Countywide Juvenile Justice Consortium (CJJC), Shelby County, Tennessee



BACKGROUND

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: September 17, 2015, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

LOCATION: Shelby County Schools, 2485 Union Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, 38112

CJJC ATTENDEES: Sandra Boyd, Quincy Hughes, Bishop Mays, Kimbrell Owens, Bridgett Stigger, Dorothy Thomas

OTHER NON-PUBLIC ATTENDEES: Marlinee Iverson (Assistant County Attorney), Bridgette Bowman (DMC Compliance Officer)

FACILITATOR: Dorothy Thomas

MEETING NOTICE DISSEMINATION: Attendees were privately contacted in order to preserve confidentiality

ATTACHMENTS: (A) CJJC FOCUS GROUP – SCRIBE NOTES, SEPTEMBER 17, 2015 and (B) CJJC FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS SUBMITTED BY DR. DOROTHY J. THOMAS

OVERVIEW

CJJC members met with three women who were either parents or grandparents of children who had had one or more contact with juvenile court in delinquency matters. One woman (Parent A) reported about her ongoing experience beginning about eight years ago involving her grandson. Two women (Parent B and Parent C) reported about their experiences from several years ago when each of their sons were roughly fifteen to seventeen years old. The sons are now in their early twenties.

Parent A background: Parent A is actually the grandmother of the child who had his first contact with the Court eight years ago. He began having delinquency problems after he was sexually molested by a man in his neighborhood. The perpetrator has never been charged although the child knows who he is and has seen him around since the assault. In addition to the delinquency problems, the child became suicidal, and that continues on today. His father is in and out of prison, and his mother does not provide as much support as his grandmother. The child, now sixteen years old, has been transported to Lakeside on multiple occasions (by Juvenile Court) due to being a suicide risk. Parent A did not believe this intervention has ever been effective. She complained that her grandson was given medication that is contra-indicated for a heart problem he has. So, she believes his

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life was and is put in danger every time he is sent to Lakeside. She stated that some of the people at Lakeside did not seem to care or “look out” for these potential problems on the front end, such as by doing a physical exam and determining what medications he could take before administering them to him. She would have liked her grandson to have received immediate psychological assistance following the abuse he suffered. She did not think sending him to Lakeside for two days and then sending him back home did anything for her grandson. She believes that if he had received this assistance, he would not have had the delinquency problems. She reported asking someone in the Evaluation and Referral Bureau for more assistance, and she was told that there was too much of a “backlog.” This occurred this year. She also mentioned several times that it appeared to her that people at Juvenile Court were overly concerned about collecting or assessing money for the detention, supervision, and general administrative costs of handling her grandson’s delinquency matters. They seemed more concerned about money than about helping her grandson.

Parent B background: Parent B has a son who has had two contacts with the Court, once when he was fifteen years old and again when he was seventeen. She was incarcerated for about five years while her child was younger, and she has been actively trying to avoid making the same mistakes for herself, for him, and for her family. She believes that the Court over-charged and over-disciplined him. His first contact with the Court involved a group fight and a bike being stolen. He admits being involved in the fight but maintains his innocence about the stolen bike. He nevertheless entered a guilty plea to a robbery charge due to force being used in the incident. Two years later, he was charged with unlawful possession of a weapon (a gun), and he faced a transfer proceeding due to the prior robbery conviction. In lieu of transfer, he opted to go to Wilder for several months. Parent B said that he had a good experience at Wilder. She did not think that he should have faced a transfer proceeding though because the facts of his prior case were less dangerous than it appeared on his record.

Parent C background: Parent C reported that her son had two contacts with the Court, once when he was sixteen and again when he was seventeen. She stated that she was concerned with gang intimidation and/or recruitment while he was in detention. She said he was there for ten hours and she did not have any specific problems with detention. She was the least talkative of the group, but she agreed with the concerns about juvenile court personnel in general being focused on the financial aspect of a case instead of being focused on helping the child. She also shared in the recommendations for improvements voiced by the Parent A and Parent B (see below).

The women were asked whether they had any recommendations for improvements, and they responded as follows:

1. One recurring complaint by all three women was the concern about money. They mentioned that the first thing that got mentioned to them was money—costs were mentioned “right up front.” This gave them the impression that the priority for the Court was money first and juveniles second.

2. They would like some sort of quicker, long-term intervention for juveniles, especially for juveniles who have been traumatized by things like physical abuse. Parent A does not think she has ever gotten that for her grandson, and he is still having contact with the Court.

3. They recommended that parents have access to a free mentor or liaison that they can go to (instead of relying on their child's attorney) and ask questions about the delinquency process. They would like this person to be available in person and by phone. They did not think the social services people they had contact with were useful in this regard. They could not always get this information from their child's attorney. They said this was a necessary part of the process because parents are kept ignorant about what is going on while their children are "run through the system." They would also like the Court to provide resources that can point them "in the right direction" in helping their children.

4. Parent B wanted there to be some sort of "checks and balances" to make sure that the "PDs were PD-ing" and the "counselors were counseling."

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Consortium members have met and discussed items brought up at the public meeting, and we have the following concerns:

1. Would the Court provide information to the CJC about the costs related to delinquency matters? Also, what is the process used by court personnel to collect the money and what is the money used for?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be clarity about the process for family members of juveniles as soon as possible, preferably before fourteen days. A liaison should be available to explain to parents what is going on in the process in an expeditious manner.

Approved:
Countywide Juvenile Justice Consortium
October 2015

Countywide Juvenile Justice Consortium (CJJC), Shelby County, Tennessee

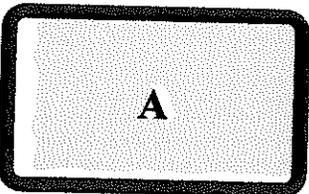


**CJJC FOCUS GROUP
 SEPTEMBER 17, 2015
 TEACHING AND LEARNING ACADEMY
 2485 UNION AVE., MEMPHIS, TN 38112
 5:30 p.m.**

Members Present:

- Mr. Bishop Mays, CJJC Chairman/Panel Member
- Mrs. Quincy Hughes-Scribe
- Dr. Dorothy Thomas- Facilitator
- Mrs. Sandra Boyd-Panel Member
- Mr. Jeremy Calhoun-Panel Member
- Ms. Bridgett Bowman-Panel Member
- Ms. Marlinee Iverson, Legal Counsel-Observer
- Ms. Kimbrell Owens-Observer
- Ms. Bridget Stigger-Observer

The meeting opened with introduction of the members present and Dr. Dorothy Thomas, facilitator giving an overview of the CJJC's role. She thanked the participants for their willingness to share their stories. Dr. Thomas also advised them that they should feel free to share and that this is an attempt to gather data related to experiences with Juvenile Court. The participants were also advised that their responses would be recorded anonymously.

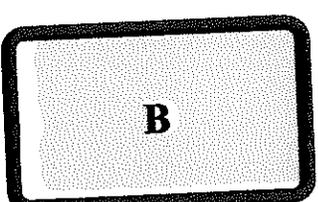


Question	Responder 1	Responder 2	Responder 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When your child was engaged in the Juvenile Court system, how long was it before you were informed of the pending charges that your child faced? 	Within 24 hour	About 10 hours	Within 24 to 48 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How old was your child when he /she first experienced an episode with the Juvenile Court system? • Follow-up question - Were there other encounters and if so, how many? 	8 and ongoing since age 8	16 first time and 17 second time	15 first time and 17 second time

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What concerns did you have or do you have about the treatment that your child received during their time in Juvenile Court? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took too long to address issue • No arrest of offender • No therapy for child although child was suicidal and continues to struggle with suicidal attempts and ideations. • When child disclosed victimization (sexual) the worker at JC threw her hands in the air and stated, "We have a backlog in that area." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took child to JC and gave me 10 minutes to come and get him. • Was billed \$75.00 for child's stay. 	<p>Concerned about how he was treated by the courts. They blew a school fight out of proportion. Neither Child nor parent had contact with attorney prior to court case. The punishment was too extreme for the offense. (Child was involved in a bike theft and adjudicated on a robbery charge that resulted in a determinate sentence.)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did your child report-feeling safe in Juvenile Court? If not, please explain. • What things in the Juvenile Court system are you satisfied with? What things are you dissatisfied with? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child was transported between Lakeside and JC and no one did anything to help him. He has a lot of issues. I am not satisfied with anything about the court. • A mentor was assigned but never did anything. He avoided contact and was never available when we called. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The short amount of time there he did feel safe. • Gang members attempted to recruit him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was at JC for a short time and he felt safe. • I am dissatisfied with the end result. • A lot of red tape to get nothing. • Attorney was not helpful at all. Attorney really did not represent child well. • Good experience with Wilder. (Where child was placed post adjudication).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up Question: What is your current opinion of JC and how is your child now? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is all about the money. I cannot afford to get the therapy he needs. If you miss a session that the court provides, you are fined. Families cannot afford services. • He is 16 now. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is 22 now and still getting into trouble. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is working and still has issues. • Parents and children are stereotyped and so are the parents by the courts. Because I spent time in prison, my child and I were judged. We were not treated fairly by the courts. • No support within the system. • No true assessment. • Services do not address identified issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up Questions: What could be done to change the system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quicker intervention is needed to see changes within the juvenile Court system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks and balances are needed at all levels. • The school fight at 15 was

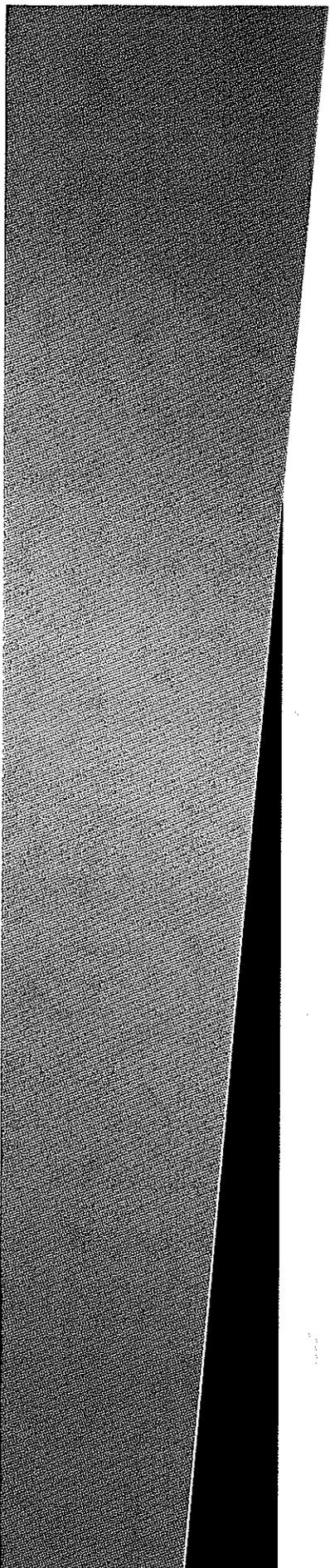
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something needs to be done about the amount of charges (fines) leveled against parents. 		<p>blown out of proportion; he was taking up for a girl. Since he had that on his record when he was later charged with the bike theft (he did not take the bike but was there) the punishment was too harsh.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents need someone available to help them navigate the system as well as understand the process. • We need to know what resources are there and they need to be free.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Based on your encounter, what would have made you satisfied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to resolve problem. • Lakeside (JC sent him to Lakeside) to approach issue holistic. They gave him medication without medical history. Child has heart issues and medication given caused problems. Child struggled and continues to struggle. • Perpetrator had been arrested. The child knew him and the courts were provided the information and did nothing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the court had not overreacted with first offense. • If the court appointed attorney had worked harder. • A process like Restorative Justice to give opportunity to process concern and give child a chance to make things right.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Are the fathers involved with the children? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In and out of his life due to incarceration. • When father is involved, the child is better. Father does better than the mother does. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His father was murdered when child was 10 years old. • Child also witness his 30-year-old uncle murdered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has always had access to his father, • He has had a continual father figure in my paramour.

The CJJC asked the panel if they had any suggestions or questions for us. The consensus was that they felt valued and heard. They did suggest that the seating be more family like and we all sit together. They wanted to know what the CJJC could do to help them individually. The members offered their individual and collective expertise to assist them and shared contact information. Each stated that this type focus group was valuable to those who have had contact with Juvenile Court.



CJJC FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

SUBMITTED IN PART BY
DR. DOROTHY J. THOMAS



RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

▶ Q#1

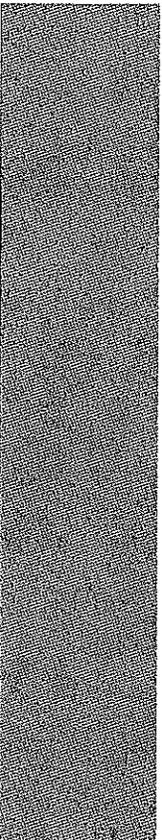
▶ Parents were informed on average of 24 hours regarding pending charges.

▶ Q#2

▶ Average age of first encounter= 13

▶ Q#4

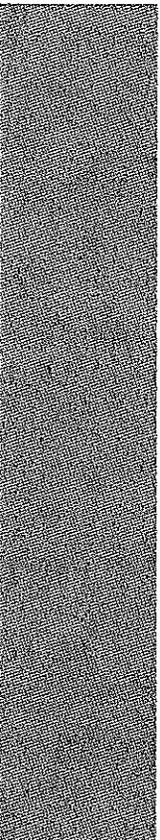
▶ 33% of parents interviewed reported youth feeling safe.



RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

▶ Q#3

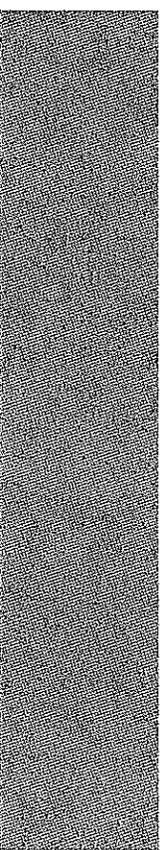
▶ Their were numerous concerns, including billing for retention, excessive punishment for offense and lack of involvement by the court.



RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

▶ Q#5

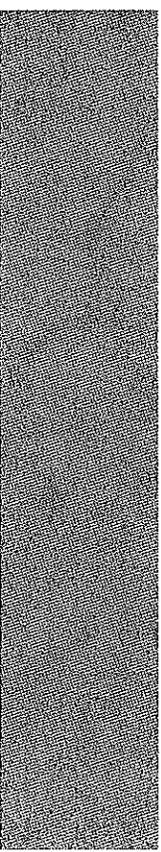
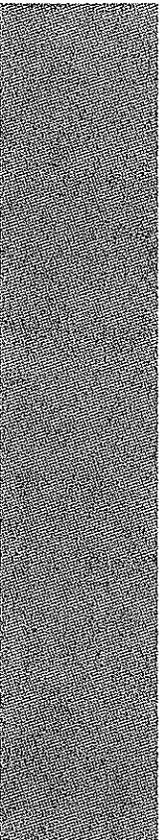
- ▶ Mentoring program was not productive. Should be monitored and held accountable.
- ▶ There should be separation for the kids from gang members.
- ▶ Assessments are not complete and services indicated do not address the child's issues.



FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

▶ #2

- ▶ Quicker Intervention needed
- ▶ Charges are inappropriate
- ▶ Checks and balances needed at all levels



FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

▶ Q#3

- ▶ To work more diligently to resolve the problem.
- ▶ Court assigned attorneys should be more vested in the interest of the child.
- ▶ 66% of those on the panel indicated no father influence in the child's life.

▶ Q#4

